

NyxTimes

9-13-74 c

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Secret War on Chile

IN THE NATION

By Tom Wicker

On the very day that President Ford extended preventive pardon to Richard Nixon, another high crime of the Nixon Administration was being disclosed in The New York Times. Public outrage because of the pardon must not be allowed to obscure this sordid story of indefensible American intervention in the internal affairs of Chile, in the years just before the violent overthrow of the Allende Government and the death of President Salvador Allende Gossens.

Secretary of State Henry Kissinger appears to have been a principal force in this covert intervention, and is being charged once again with not having told the whole truth to a Senate committee. Demands are being heard for a reopening of the hearings which recommended his confirmation as Secretary.

The Times story, by Seymour Hersh, was based on a letter from Representative Michael Harrington of Massachusetts to Chairman Thomas E. Morgan of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. The Harrington letter gave an account, from memory, of testimony to a House Armed Services subcommittee by William E. Colby, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mr. Harrington said he had twice read a transcript of the Colby testimony. As he described it to Mr. Morgan, Mr. Colby said that the Nixon Administration had authorized about \$8 million to be spent covertly to make it impossible for President Allende to govern. Specifically, \$500,000 was authorized in both 1969 and 1970 to help Mr. Allende's election opponents, and \$350,000 was later authorized for bribing members of the Chilean Congress to vote against ratifying Mr. Allende's election.

Later \$5 million was authorized for clandestine "destabilization" efforts in Chile; and in 1973, \$1.5 million was provided to help anti-Allende candidates in municipal elections. The authorizing body for all this C.I.A. activity was the so-called "40 Committee" of the Nixon Administration—a committee chaired by Henry Kissinger.

But Mr. Kissinger told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during his confirmation hearings that "the C.I.A. had nothing to do with the coup, to the best of my knowledge and belief." While that may have been true in the narrowest sense, it was at best one of those tortuous non-lies in which governments specialize and at worst a concealment of the true nature of U.S. policy toward the Allende Government and the scope of American activities to undermine that Government.

Similarly, Edward M. Korry, ambassador to Chile during most of the period in question, denied under oath to a Senate subcommittee that there had been American attempts to "pressure, subvert, influence a single member of the Chilean Congress." Charles A. Meyer, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Latin-American affairs, also swore that the United States had scrupulously followed a policy of non-intervention in Chile.

No wonder, then, that Senator Frank Church, to whose subcommittee this sworn testimony was offered, was reported to be outraged upon learning of the Colby testimony. He has properly raised not only the possibility of perjury charges but the question of comprehensive hearings by the full Foreign Relations Committee on the intervention in Chile.

If such hearings are held, or if Mr. Kissinger's confirmation hearings should be reopened—as they already have been once, to inquire into charges that he did not tell the whole truth about wiretaps on reporters and some of his associates—the inquiry should press much further than the candor of official testimony, important as that question is.

But as one Government official pointed out to Mr. Hersh, if covert activities against another country are authorized, Government officials—sometimes including Secretaries of State and Presidents—have to lie about them. Lies are part of the business. The real questions are whether this supposedly peace-loving and democratic nation has any legal or moral right to conduct covert operations abroad, and whether any Administration of either party has the constitutional authority to order taxpayers' money spent for clandestine warfare against the legitimate government of a sovereign country.

These questions are long overdue for full and open debate; the Colby testimony, for example, said the first intervention against Mr. Allende was ordered by Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Congress, the press, Presidential candidates—all have consistently shied away from this subject. Supposed liberals have pled the supposed need to be "hard-nosed." The real need is to face the fact that gangster schemes of bribery, violence and even assassination are being carried out, in the name of the great American people.

The C.I.A. may be only an instrument, but it seems to have its own sinister vitality. The Chilean efforts, in fact, were authorized by the lineal descendent of a body set up by the Kennedy Administration to "control" the C.I.A. Isn't it clear at last that such "control" can be achieved only by a Government with the political will to cut the C.I.A. in half, or kill it altogether?